

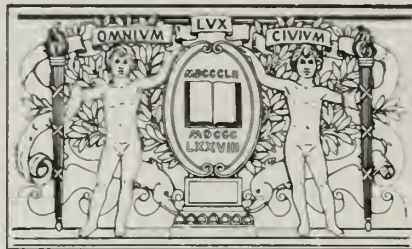
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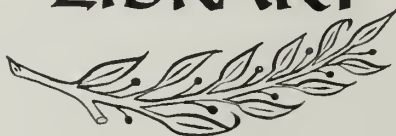
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# Hyde Park

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HENRY ADAMS, the nineteenth century philosopher, said that the history of America is not the history of a few, but the history of the many people of Boston's neighborhood accepted the challenge of Adam's statement to produce "people's histories" of their own communities. Hundreds of Bostonians formed committees in each of fifteen neighborhoods of the city, volunteering their time the past year and a half to research in libraries, search for photographs, produce questionnaires, transcribe tapes, assist in writing and editing. These booklets are not traditional textbook histories, and we have attempted to cull a statistical sample. We have simply talked with our neighbors, people who remember sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, but always with wisdom. For each of us has his or her own story to tell, and these stories are vital to the development of our neighborhoods and our city.

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*Boston 200 is the city's official program to observe the Bicentennial of the American Revolution from April 1977 through December 1976.*

KEVIN H. WHITE, Mayor  
KATHARINE D. KANE,  
President, The Boston 200 Corporation  
1 Beacon Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108  
617-338-1775

# HYDE PARK

*Some towns in our commonwealth, older and doubtless wiser than we, looked on and with mingled feelings of amusement and dismay, saw our young Samson shake his locks . . . But though earnest and impetuous, we were not idiotic. We had an end to reach and bent towards it.*

—The Rev. Perley B. Davis in 1888 on the 20th anniversary of the incorporation of Hyde Park.

**P**IONEERS settled Hyde Park; the kind with free spirits and courage to tame the wilderness. They came in the mid-1800s to the pine forest beside the Mother Brook at the same time kindred souls were pressing westward to chart the unknown plains. The Hyde Park homesteaders were a mere nine miles from the Boston State House, but, like their western counterparts, they were a world away.

Today the world has shrunk. The sprawling community, comprising Boston's most distant neighborhood, is inhabited largely by office workers, professionals and civil servants (including many policemen and firefighters) who commute daily to downtown jobs.

The area's residents return at night to Cape Cod

Houses and Garrison Colonials along Hyde Park Avenue and River Street, duplexes and triple-deckers in Readville and Sunnyside, and a sprinkling of fine mansions on Fairmount Hill.

The citizens of Hyde Park, which is bounded by Dedham and the Stony Brook Reservation on the west and the Blue Hills of Milton on the east, have mixed feelings about their relationship with Boston. Some argue their community has suffered neglect since annexation to Boston in 1912. Thirteen years ago, during the controversy over construction of the Southwest Expressway, there was a movement to secede, a movement which was revived in 1974 over the issue of court ordered busing of school children.

Though the history of Hyde Park, dating from the Civil War era rather than colonial times, is over 100 years shorter than that of most Bay State cities and towns, it does not lack for drama. During the second half of the 19th century, the community was home for fiery abolitionists and suffragettes, notably, the Grimke sisters, Angelina and Sarah. At Camp Meigs in Readville, the first black regiment mustered for the Civil War was trained. A bas-relief by Augustus Saint-Gaudens commemorating Colonel Robert Gould



*The old Central Fire Station*



Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment stands opposite the State House.

Before 1850, there was no Hyde Park—only five drumlins, (hills formed by the glaciers) covered with high bush blueberries, pines and birches. A scattering of farmhouses, no more than 10, and several mills, including a cotton mill owned by James Read, and the Sumner Paper Mill, dotted the landscape near the river. An early historian, Edmund Davis, describes Sumner Hall, built in 1790 for William Sumner, as an impressive edifice “in the midst of well-kept grounds and fine orchards.” There was also the “elegant, French cottage” of Congressman William S. Damrell, “an intense anti-slavery man, bold and fearless.” Nearby was Muddy Pond Woods, where, according to Davis, “immersed in this maze of sylvan delights one hardly realizes he is within a few miles of metropolitan New England.”

In 1847 Henry Grew, a Boston dry goods importer, took a holiday excursion to the area with his wife. He found the countryside so compelling, he remained to build a house. “We stopped in the woods,” said Grew, “and strolling about unexpectedly came to a point where we were very much pleased with the view of the Blue Hills and the valley in between.” Of his new home, Grew said, “We are almost literally surrounded by woods. My friends in Boston are much surprised at my going to such a wild and lonely place.”

The loneliness prevailed until 10 years later when a 23-year-old land developer from Orange, New Hampshire appeared on the scene. Alpheus P. Blake and his Twenty Associates are credited with founding Hyde Park on Fairmount Hill, though it was not until April 28, 1868 that the town was officially incorporated. The community was named after London’s Hyde Park by an Englishman, the Rev. Henry Lyman, one of Hyde Park’s earliest settlers.

Blake assembled a varied group to further his development scheme and plans for the experimental

subdivision, probably one of the first in the country, were hatched in a Boston boarding house. Among the associates were a blacksmith, a sea captain, a tailor, a fruit dealer, a milliner and a writing master. “They bought 100 acres at \$200 an acre extending from what is Prospect Street all the way down to Neponset River,” explained Adrian Eckberg in a recent presentation to a fifth grade class at the Henry Grew School. “They bought it from two farmers who lived on Brush Hill Road in Milton. The architect drew up a central plan so all 20 houses would be alike. They found it was more economical to have one set of plans for the carpenters and to buy materials for all 20 houses at once.”

The construction project did not go smoothly. Even before building began, several of the original partners became discouraged and pulled out after a tour of the site for which they were forced to walk two miles from Mattapan. The wildness of the terrain and the steepness of the hill made hauling lumber by team from Milton extremely difficult and at one point the project was almost abandoned. An account in an 1886 issue of the Norfolk County Gazette tells how several families spent their first winter in unfinished homes. They shielded themselves against the cold by wearing overcoats to bed. “They were next to perishing,” said the account. “When the ground was not frozen, the mud was ankle deep.”

The end of the Civil War spurred rapid-fire growth in the area and by 1867 lot prices were quadrupling in a few weeks time. The influx of new settlers brought rumblings for incorporation as an independent town. Residents complained of having no fire department, no street lights, poor schools and ungraded roads “having for their pavement stumps and roots of trees.” School was held in halls, private houses and soldiers’ barracks.

The battle over incorporation was “hot and furious” according to historian Edmund Davis. The residents of Brush Hill Road, today noted for its fine estates and mansions, fought stubbornly to remain in



*The first  
Board of Selectmen of  
the Town of Hyde Park, 1866*

Milton. In the end a compromise was reached and Hyde Park took 1300 acres from Dorchester, 800 from Dedham and 700 from Milton, which was allowed to keep Brush Hill Road.

Incorporation day was marked by fireworks, a 100 gun salute and a rainbow at sunset. Hyde Park's industry at that time consisted of a cotton mill, a woolen mill, a paper mill, a needle factory, an iron works and and car shops.

"We have far more internal vitality than pertains to most towns so near a great metropolis. We are something more than a mere sleeping room to Boston," said the Rev. Perley B. Davis in a speech at the town's 20th anniversary celebration, in 1888.

Part of this vitality stemmed from a group of original thinkers who cultivated a uniquely modern social

and literary consciousness in the community. One of the most prominent of this breed was a New Hampshire woman named Mehitable Sunderland. Though she did not come to Hyde Park until her fiftieth year after her three daughters were grown, she lived to give 44 years of service to the community. Mehitable was Hyde Park's first doctor and an activist in women's rights and black rights. She moved to the town with her daughter and son-in-law in 1857, the year after the Twenty Associates began their subdivision.

Soon after her arrival Mehitable struck out on her own, buying land on Williams Avenue for \$100. She eventually built 16 houses and rented some of them to Negroes. "She acutely felt the plight of Negroes and realized the difficulties they faced in obtaining suitable housing," explained Elizabeth Freeman in a lecture

before a Hyde Park school group. "She was also one of those old time Methodists who thought cards were the invention of the devil. Every Friday night she hitched up her horse and buggy and went around to collect the rents. If she found any evidence of card playing, the tenant was evicted."

A newspaper account of the period describes Mehitable's medical talents: "Her plaid hood and gray cloak was a welcome sight where the raging fever or the scarlet spots of measles held sway. Nor could even that tabooed horror, smallpox, frighten this intrepid, sympathizing woman. On Fairmount alone, she heard the first cries of 50 little pairs of lungs and in the country roundabout she welcomed probably 300 new citizens into the world. Her practice extended to Dorchester, Dedham and Milton."

On March 7, 1870, Mehitable led a band of 42 Hyde Park women and their male escorts in a symbolic act which received nationwide notoriety. Carrying bouquets of flowers, the protestors marched through a driving snowstorm to the town polling place where the ladies dropped their ballots into a special receptacle. Historian Davis notes it was "feared that unmanly measures might be adopted" to stop women. However, town moderator Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., a novelist, "produced calm on the floor . . . and the ladies advanced without further molestation." It was the first suffrage demonstration in Massachusetts and a catalyst for the many which were later staged across the country.

Hyde Park women were given the right to vote for town committee member long before there was general women's suffrage, according to Elizabeth Freeman. Mehitable, she said, never missed casting her ballot even when in her nineties. During her last years, she lived with her granddaughter, Ada Cooper Sheehy at 60 Central Avenue. "She was able to be up and about," said Mrs. Freeman, "and was often seen walking on the veranda in nice weather." At her death in 1901 she was Hyde Park's oldest resident.

Mehitable was not the only freedom fighter in Hyde Park; there were the famous Grimke sisters and Angelina Grimke's husband, Theodore Weld. The Grimkes were the daughters of a wealthy South Carolina judge and planter and had experienced slavery first hand during their childhood. Sarah once wrote of seeing "a Human head stuck up high on a pole" and a runaway punished by having to wear a heavy iron collar with three long prongs. The runaway's front tooth had been extracted to mark her and she had received a severe whipping.

The sisters later moved north where they became Quakers and outspoken abolitionists. In 1838, a full 10 years before the Seneca Falls Convention,\* Angelina won a place in history as the first American woman to address a legislative body. Her appearance at the Boston State House drew huge crowds anxious to see the woman who had been called "devil-ina" in the newspapers and who had been castigated in a pastoral letter from the Council on Congregational Ministers. Presenting an anti-slavery petition signed by 20,000 women, Angelina skillfully appealed for the liberation of both slaves and females.

"I stand before you as a moral being," she declared. "And as a moral being I feel that I owe it to the suffering slave and to the deluded master, to my country and to the world, to do all that I can to overturn a system of complicated crimes built upon the broken hearts and prostrate bodies of my countrymen in chains and cemented by the blood, sweat and tears of my sisters in bonds."

Addressing herself to the plight of women, she demanded of the largely-male audience, "Are we aliens because we are mothers, wives and daughters of a mighty people? Have women no country? No interests staked in the public weal?"

The Grimkes and Weld, who like the sisters was an ardent abolitionist, did not settle in Hyde Park until many years later when their youthful fervor had cooled. They lived quietly there in the years following







*Snow scene  
on Water Street, 1895*



he Civil War, tending to local affairs and leaving the strenuous public fight to others. The sisters never grew too old, however, to assist the cause they so dearly loved, and they participated in the 1870 suffrage demonstration and door-to-door petition drives.

Frequent visitors at their home were William Lloyd Garrison, John Greenleaf Whittier and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Weld was prominent in Hyde Park community affairs, organizing the local Women's Suffrage League in 1887. He served as a member of the local school committee and as an officer of the town, and helped found Hyde Park's free public library.

Sarah, who never married, died at 81 in 1873. Her sister followed her six years later. Weld lived on to 1895.

The late 1800s marked a period of literary flourishing in Hyde Park. It was then that the "sunset

painter" John J. Enneking had his studio in the town and that Mrs. J. Wentworth Payson hosted literary evenings at her home at 136 Fairmount Avenue. Her salon, called the Wentworth Club, was noted for its "high intellectual tone" and for drawing literati, artists and leading citizens from across the country and abroad.

Hyde Park grew rapidly during these years as waves of Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants flooded into downtown Boston. Those seeking breathing room looked to the outskirts and discovered Hyde Park. From a village of 1,512 in 1887, the community had ballooned to a population of 15,000 by 1912. The attractions were the jobs in the mills along the Neponset and the promise of country houses with grassy yards to replace inner-city tenements on concrete alleys.





*Paul's Bridge*

David Lasker, then a boy of ten, moved with his family to Hyde Park in 1905. They gladly left a crowded East Boston.

"I remember my father saying to my mother, 'We're going to live in Hyde Park some day. I certainly don't want the children being brought up where we are now.' So on the 25th of July, the moving van drove up to the house at 116 Everett Street and started packing for the long trip. We went down Southberry, Atlantic Avenue, up Kneeland Street and Washington Street, through Dudley Street, Hyde Park Avenue to Oakland Street, down Harvard Street to Wood Avenue to 22 Parker Street. There were only two houses on the road in those days; 9 Parker Street where the Brink family lived—Mr. Brink was a farmer—and 22

Parker, which was a new house just built. My father was overjoyed with the beauty of the whole area, the forest land, so different from East Boston . . . Everything was woods."

Clem Norton's relatives settled in Hyde Park because they found work there. Norton, now 80, has been a Hyde Park resident all his life. A former city councilman and member of the Boston School Committee, he served for many years as superintendent of Commonwealth Pier.

"My ancestors were Irish Americans who came in the 1850s during the potato famine. They got a job in the mill so they settled in Hyde Park. My grandmother and grandfather both had to work and my parents, too. For small pay. But what attracted them to Hyde Park

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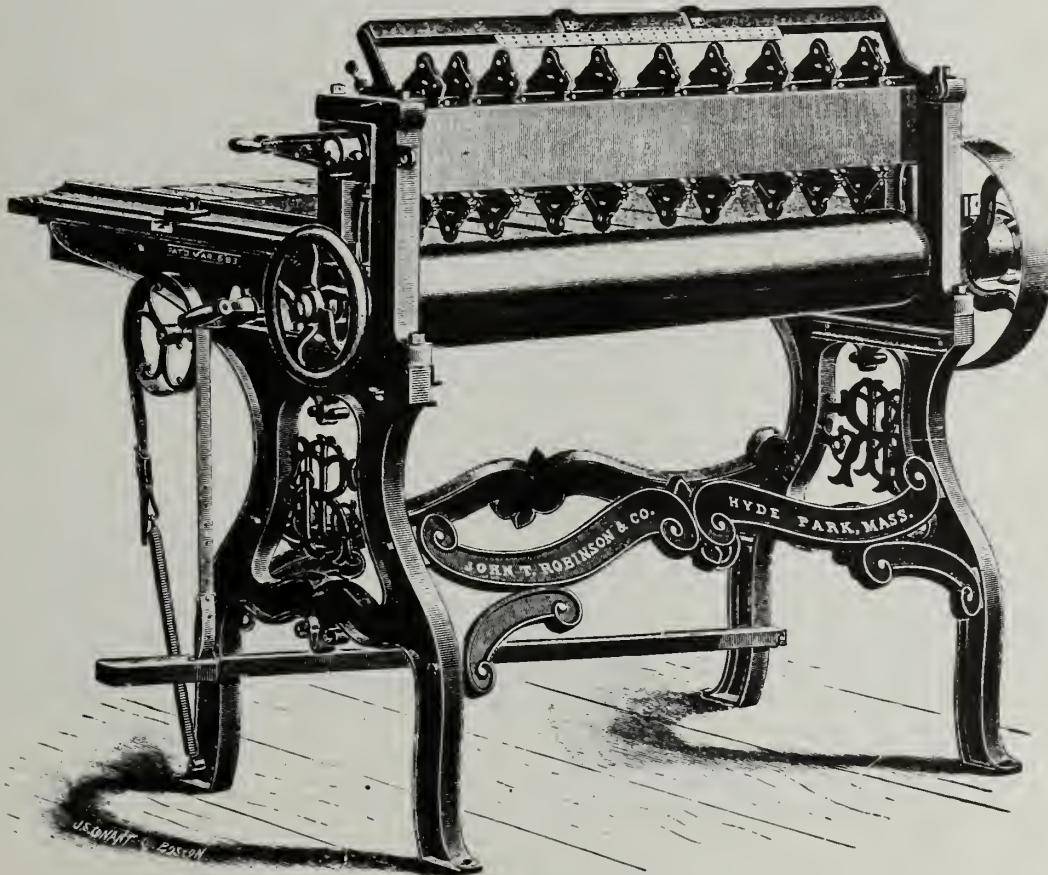
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*The Sturtevant Blower Works*

was the American Tool Machine Shop. I was born right in front of it on Hyde Park Avenue.

"We had a lot of mills but they're all gone now. The main car shops for the New Haven Railroad, the first paper factory in the country on River Street—they were all in Hyde Park."

Michael Walsh, a rare book dealer for Goodspeed's on Beacon Street, was born in Ireland. His mother came to America ahead of her children and sent for them when she had raised the money.

"It's a story that's fairly common to the Irish," he explains. "The Irish girls came out and worked as maids and cooks with the Yankee families. Then, when

they thought they had saved enough money, they went home and got married. That was the case with my mother. After her marriage and the birth of her four children, she returned to America and earned enough money to bring her family over. We all came from Ireland in 1902, right to Hyde Park."

Walsh's father "got a job the second day he was in the country. They were putting in a sewer on Wood Avenue and it was all pick and shovel then. There weren't any steamshovels or things like that. He went out and got a pick and shovel job. He worked ten hours a day, six days a week, \$1.50 a day. And he worked."



*Inside the old Tileston Hollingsworth Mills*

Twenty-four-year-old Joe Langille, who works in Hyde Park's Little City Hall, is the grandson of an Italian railroad man. "He came to America to work," says Langille. "He was an only child so he was kind of free to go where he wanted. In Italy there was some type of relationship between his family and my grandmother's family. He sent for her, saying, 'Come on over; if I like you, I'll pay for your trip, if not, you have to pay for it yourself.' She liked him. He was good looking and she married him and they settled in Hyde Park."

The community is today "quite a melting pot," according to George Merry, a lifelong resident who is State House reporter for the Christian Science Monitor. "We have a very large Italian population, a good sized Irish population and all groups seem to get along. There are some blacks and there are more coming in. Of course, we've always had blacks in the community. I've had some black friends whose family has lived here since the 1870s. We also have a pretty large Polish population and there is a Polish Catholic church. Recently older people have moved here in large numbers from the Mattapan section. Jewish people and others, too. There are a lot more Jewish people now than there used to be."

One of the oldest black families in Hyde Park was that of James Monroe Trotter. "He was one of those who trained at Fort Meigs with Robert Shaw," explains Nancy Hannan, a lawyer who is president of the Hyde Park Historical Society. "He was the first colored officer of the American army at anytime any place. And it was because of his training at Fort Meigs that he came and lived in Hyde Park. James Monroe was a minister and then he entered the Union Army and became a commissioned officer. When he left the army, he returned to the ministry. His son, Leland, was a newspaper editor who rose to national prominence."

As different ethnic groups arrived in Hyde Park they established their own churches. "It started out as

a Protestant town," says Mrs. Hannan. "The Twenty Associates, the land developers, were mostly Protestant. But shortly after they started, two or three of them sold out. Then they sold to others and so forth. Very early there were several Catholics in Hyde Park, which was a little unusual for a small town. Then, of course the mills brought in the Polish. The Jewish community has never been large but we've always had one. In 1905 they formed a Jewish congregation and in 1907 they built their present synagogue. All the Protestant denominations are represented here."

Since the turn of the century, Hyde Park has been predominantly Catholic. There are currently five Catholic churches in the community. Years ago, Hyde Park had well-defined neighborhoods whose boundaries were drawn on ethnic and religious lines. Today the neighborhoods are less distinct.

"The Jewish area is what they call Stonybrook and Georgetown," says Joe Langille. "Most of the people there have moved from Mattapan. The Italian area is Hyde Park Avenue, Glenwood Avenue and parts of Readville. The Polish people are near their church. The Irish are kind of all over, maybe mainly on Fairmount Hill. It used to be if you weren't Protestant you never had a chance up there. Today it's changed."

"Fairmount is where the wealthy live—a few doctors, many lawyers, executives of businesses. A lot of city officials up there, too. The mayor's administrator lives there and the top assistant district attorney. The city licensor lives there and state Rep. Michael Feeney. In fact, he lives next door to former City Treasurer Daniel Driscoll."

David Lasker has fond memories of "long coasting episodes" on Fairmount Hill. "You'd get on a sled at the top of Fairmount Hill and Prospect Street, and coast all the way down to Fairmount Avenue across the grade crossing to Pierce Street . . . The gate tender would stand there in amazement, particularly when he saw the train coming from Readville."

Lasker remembers other sections. "There was



*Lithograph  
of an elegant  
Hyde Park Home, 1890*



Rugby, from Wood Avenue down through the wooded areas there. Oakland Street coming to Mattapan. Ablewood, Forest Hills, Readville, Climehurst and Sunnyside. In those days, we youngsters knew every single section. Today we live in Hyde Park and that's all it is, Hyde Park."

"Sunnyside," muses Fr. David M. Burke, pastor of St. Pius X Church, "nobody seems to know the origin of that except that those of us who lived there felt the sun always shone over there regardless of what was happening in the rest of Hyde Park. Then there was Corriganville, named after a family that had lived here for generations called Corrigan."

Readville is perhaps best known for its race track though during the Civil War it was distinguished as the site of Fort Meigs, training ground for the war's first black regiment. "After the war, they broke up Camp Meigs," says Mrs. Irene Reynolds, a long-time resident of the neighborhood. "The barracks were sold for a token fee and moved to different streets where people made houses out of them. In 1923 there were still several houses left that had been built from the barracks."

"The race track was still around too. It was a sulky track and I think the last sulky race was in 1924. Sulky racing was really a society thing in those days. The elite of Boston would come out. They'd run special

trains from South Station and there was a spur off the railroad so you could get off right at the track. I've seen pictures of ladies with parasols and long skirts getting off the train. The local people did not object to the track. It was supposed to be the best turf track in the country. Something really went out of the town when it closed. When they started making the Sumner Tunnel, they dumped all the clay on the turf and made an automobile race track. The people protested very strongly. It brought in a terrible crowd, a very different crowd. And there was dust . . . The original settlers of Readville expected it to be sort of a bedroom town to Boston, like Milton is today. But then they built the Readville car shops and the locomotive shops and that brought in a different group of people—laborers, workers."

Even more so than in other communities, the railroad tracks were the dividing lines for the neighborhoods of Hyde Park. "Fairmount and Sunnyside were the other side of the tracks, so to speak," explains George Merry. "Hyde Park is made an island, a complete island, by railroad tracks. To one side of us between Mattapan and Hyde Park is the midland division of the New York Central Railroad. That comes along near the paper mill and goes along the river over beyond River Street. It continues to Readville where it joins with the main line of the New York Central



*A postcard of the Readville Railroad tracks under a starry night*

which goes from South Station to New York. Those tracks are over on the other side of Hyde Park Avenue and behind them is Sunnyside.”

The railroad and street car lines have been a major influence on Hyde Park’s development, attracting both industry and settlers. Easy and cheap access to downtown Boston encouraged many to live in Hyde Park and commute to the city for work.

“There’s been a great change in the railroads,” laments Daniel Driscoll, the former city treasurer. “Years ago the popular way to go to work was to go down to the railroad station and get on a train. You’d buy a book of eight tickets for a dollar. It was a lovely way to ride. You’d always get a seat—unlike today going by rapid transit.

“Those were the days of the trolleys,” remembers

80-year-old Michael Walsh. “They ran from Mattapan to Brockton and from Mattapan to the Blue Hills. I was a lovely ride along Blue Hill Avenue in the open cars. That was the way we spent Sundays. There wasn’t much else for kids to do. If you had the fare, you’d take the open trolley right to Blue Hills to Houghton Pond, and swim. Then you’d walk up the Blue Hills on the pond side and come over the top and down and they had a band concert from four to six. They used to advertise a nickel from Mattapan to Arlington Heights.”

“There were a lot of trolley lines,” agrees George Merry. “Around the turn of the century they would take you almost anywhere. Some went up River Street all the way to Dedham and connected to other lines there. You could ride to Westwood which is quite a

distance from here. As late as 1948 we had streetcar lines running from Hyde Park Avenue and Cleary Square to Forest Hills."

One Hyde Park to Boston commuter, according to a story told by Clem Norton, cleverly used his time on the trolleys to win himself a job at the Boston Globe. "The father of Clifton Bantry Carvery," says Norton, "was a carpenter at the Chickering Piano factory which is still over in the South End. He was born with an instinct for the newspaper business even though he had always worked as a carpenter. Each day he would go through the train asking the passengers what was happening in their community. For years he sent little handwritten notes to the Globe and for years he got no reply. Then one day he talked to a Dedham banker who told him an employee had stolen a lot of money from the bank.

"Well, what's going to happen," he asked. "Have they said anything yet?" The reply was "No, they're going to meet tonight." The father said nothing but left work early and secretly listened in on the bank meeting. When he had got the whole story, it was ten at night, he rushed across the street, ordered a carriage at Raymond's Carriage and hurried to the Globe.

"They looked at the story and later when they found it was okay they asked Carvery what he did for a living. He said, 'I'm a carpenter in the Chickering Piano Factory.' 'And how much do you make,' they asked. He was then earning something like \$12 a week. So they said, 'We will give you \$25 if you'll come with us.' And he did."

Carvery later got his son, Clifton, a job at the Boston Post. "Clifton was a very nice little man—didn't weigh 100 pounds," remembers Norton. "Very deaf, poor eyesight and he worked until four in the morning at the Post. There were no electric cars coming to Hyde Park at that hour so he'd get as far as Forest Hills, which was four miles away, and winter and summer, he'd run all the way to Hyde Park."

Today most Hyde Park residents depend on the bus and rapid transit to get into Boston, according to Father Burke. "They have one train a day," says Fr. Burke. "But most people use the MBTA to Forest Hills. When we were youngsters, you'd grab the streetcar in Cleary Square and be on Summer Street in half an hour. Of course, the picture has changed. This is one reason why people are thinking of getting out of Hyde Park. And then, of course, the tax rate is so high in the City of Boston."

Since Hyde Park voted to annex itself to Boston in 1911 community residents have been debating the merits of the move.

"A lot of people thought it was a mistake," says Merry. "Even today, you will find some old time people who feel they have not gotten the services we would have gotten. The argument was that we would get much better schools and everything would be better. As a matter of fact, things didn't always work out quite that well. For example, all the days I was attending public elementary school, the buildings were three and four story wooden, fire-trap types. They're all gone now, either burned down or replaced, but for a long time, back into the mid-50's, we had the schools that were in existence (and not new) when Boston annexed Hyde Park. There were some people that didn't like that."

"They felt as if this was a fringe of the city," agrees Father Burke, "and that that was about all we got from the city—fringe benefits. It was a sore spot for a lot of older people. As a matter of fact, many people are nowadays beginning to agitate to split the town away from the city and return to a separate township. They feel the town made responsible for itself would be far better off economically, socially and culturally."

According to Mrs. Nancy Hannan, whose family came to Hyde Park in the early 1930s, annexation might not have occurred had the economic boost from World War I come sooner. "There was a recession in



the country in 1912 and the Hyde Park industries were slowing down. But these industries would also pick up again when the war came."

Clem Norton was 17 at the time of annexation. He remembers, "there was a big, big fight and the various religions got into it. The Protestant churches were against joining Boston. The Catholic Church was for it. And Hyde Park was predominantly Catholic."

A prime mover for annexation, according to David Lasker, was Robert Bleakie, owner of the Bleakie & Co. Woolen Mill. "He became interested in what he called 'greater goals for Hyde Park'" says Lasker, "and he suggested a vote to annex. He said 'you have so much to gain by it. You're going to be a part of a metropolitan city.' And in 1910 Boston was the fourth largest city in population in the United States.

"Many people were very much impressed at the enthusiasm Bleakie had shown. So on the first Tuesday, following the first Monday in November, 1911, the people voted 2 to 1 in favor of annexation. In spite of the fact that Hyde Park was about \$10 million in debt, the City of Boston was willing to absorb it because of the huge income in taxes it would get from the factories here. There were about 30 different kinds of factories here, so it was a boon to Boston. Mayor John F. Fitzgerald in Waverly Hall promised the citizens of Hyde Park the entire world. We were hopeful the mayor and city fathers would keep their word, but all we got was a municipal building in 1921."

There are some, however, among them Boston fireman Richard Baldwin, and his wife Lora, who protest it would be foolhardy for Hyde Park to divorce itself from Boston. "I think a lot of people don't realize what is involved to actually start all over again," says Mrs. Baldwin. "The taxes would rise because you would have to re-establish every service we get from the city, such as fire and police protection, schools, every single thing and it would take years."

Hyde Park is today the largest precinct in Boston, according to Father Burke. Its population numbers

about 38,000, he says. Industry, which took advantage of water power from nearby rivers, was once an important influence in the community but over the years its significance has waned. In recent decades the big employer has been government.

"There are cotton mills, up at the old mill pond," says Father Burke. "They no longer operate but many of the people in years gone by—my older brothers, for example—they worked in those cotton mills. Today most people work in the city of Boston and commute in. This is one reason people feel Hyde Park has lost its individuality—because people are Boston-oriented they just think in terms of Boston and not of their own town. There is not much industry left in Hyde Park. Westinghouse still employs a large number. But outside of that, it is mostly into Boston. Many people who live here are on the Boston police force, or teach in the city schools. I think people have civil service jobs because of the security. There are also a lot of politicians.

Clem Norton is one of those who jumped at the chance to enter government. "The minute I got old enough, I took a civil service exam and landed as clerk at Commonwealth Pier. That was in 1913 and was there for 40 years. I was head of the pier for years. Civil service jobs were better than working in the factories. In the old days the factories didn't pay well and with civil service you got a good pension."

After finishing grammar school, Norton worked days and attended night school and eventually Suffolk Law School. He helped pay tuition for his two younger brothers who went to Harvard in dentistry and medicine. One later became head of Boston State Hospital.

"Those were the days," recalls Michael Walsh "when more than half the kids that graduated from grammar school didn't go on to high school. They went to work. It was usually a case of having to work to help support the family. I was the oldest. I never went to high school. None of my brothers and sisters went to high school."

Walsh has been working since he was 15 at Good



*Tileston Hollingsworth Mills  
now Diamond International*

peed's, the Boston rare book store. He has been there for 65 years and specializes in American history. "I got the job," says Walsh, "because my mother took in washing and I used to cart the wash back and forth. The man I did it for worked for Goodspeed, and they needed a boy."

George Merry graduated from high school in 1944. But during his junior and senior years, he worked after school at Sturtevant's, a fanblower and turbine factory, bought in 1945 by Westinghouse.

"Quite a lot of us worked in the offices," he remembers, "It was the thing to do then. We worked as office boys, typists and clerks."

Besides Sturtevant's, there were a number of other factories along the river for water power. "Mother brook," explains Merry, "was a manmade canal dug sometime in the middle 1800s. It connects the Charles River and the Neponset. In effect, everything inside that, is part of a great, big Boston island, because the

Neponset flows to Boston Harbor and the Charles flows into the Neponset." Allis Chalmers and another old factory burned down, according to Merry, but the Tileston and Hollingsworth Paper Mill on River Street is still in existence. "It makes a very fine quality paper for calendars and is one of the really old operations in the community."

Many youths trained for jobs in the mills and factories through a special five-year vocational course at Hyde Park High School. "It's quite unique," says Merry. "All during high school you spend part time working in some type of industrial work and when you get through with your schooling, you've also learned a trade."

"The average income here," according to Father Burke, "is in the \$13,000 range, which today is not very high. Many of our women work."

Hyde Park has been heavily Democratic for 50 years. "The town remained Republican until 1924



during the first Al Smith campaign," reports Daniel Driscoll. "Then Frank Donohue, a superior court judge, organized and registered a lot of people who had not previously registered to vote. Most of them happened to be Democrats, so he turned the town almost single handed from Republican to Democrat."

"There were always enough Hyde Park politicians," says Walsh. "But they never got too much in the way of favors because the number of votes here didn't count. It wasn't like South Boston and Charlestown and Dorchester. But now it's the biggest ward in the United States. State Representative Michael Paul Feeney is the senior man in the legislature. He was first elected in 1938 and he's been elected continuously since. He knows his way around."

"After he was elected," says Driscoll, "he wanted something to do. I had heard three or four children had drowned in the river so I said, 'Paul, why don't you fence in the Neponset?' He got the bills through and he lived on that politically for about 25 years. It was a good idea and one that appealed to the legislature."

"Feeney's somewhat of a conservative," says Merri, "He's not in a leadership position because when he made his grab for power it was the wrong time and he was passed over. But he's still very much there. He's done a great deal for the community in terms of getting traffic lights in and things like that, and he knows how to make the political process work for him and the community."

Hyde Park is run by the mayor of the City of Boston and the City Council, of which one member, Joseph Tierney, lives in Fairmount. The distance of the government from the community has alienated some people, according to Joe Langille. "They're kind of just sitting back and wondering who their friend is," he says.

Police coverage is one example of the problem, according to Father Burke. "The district here has to cover West Roxbury and Roslindale and Hyde Park,

which is an enormous area. They don't have enough men to care for that size district. When we were kids growing up, we needed only two policemen and we knew them inside out. This prevented a lot of problems, because if they told us to get home in a hurry or else they'd tell our fathers, we knew they knew our fathers and they'd do just that.

"Nowadays, of course, this isn't so. I would think a very small number of the police at this station are from the town. Therefore, they don't know the youngsters the way the policemen used to. The result is there are more problems with the youngsters now, right in the center of Cleary Square. We never had youngsters hanging around there before."

Cleary Square today has problems of its own, according to Father Burke. "In its day," he recalls, "it was a tremendous shopping area. People used to come from Roslindale, from Milton and from Dedham to the shop. Now, of course, there are the shopping centers. And shops in the square are continually closing up, closing for three months and then closing."

Kennedy's, one of Boston's major clothing chain stores, began in Hyde Park. "Mr. Kennedy lived on Central Avenue," explains Michael Walsh. "He started with a pack and went from house to house. His store here was a fine store. Hardly anyone in Hyde Park would think of going for clothes or shoes anywhere else. If you lived outside of walking distance, he would give you carfare. It was rather a big point in those days, even if carfare was only a nickel."

Today, according to Langille, downtown Hyde Park has "lost its community value somewhat" because residents do most of their shopping and banking at the American Legion Highway shopping center, the Stop & Shop, the Dedham Mall and the Dedham Plaza. "They sleep here but they do their business elsewhere," says Langille.

Father Burke talks of the small groceries which characterized the Hyde Park he grew up in. "We used to love the neighborhood stores and the guys that ran

*Cleary Square  
turn of the century*



them because they were awfully good to us kids. They knew everybody in the area and were sort of like the family doctor. During the Depression, some of the store owners used to carry people. They did it willingly because they knew the families and they knew that as soon as the family had the money they would be paid. Where could you do that today?"

The problems of urbanization, including the issue of forced busing to achieve racial integration, have brought more changes, according to Father Burke. "As a result of all this, some people no longer have their roots firmly imbedded here, which means, of course, they don't care for the town as much as the older people. For example, they can drive around Cleary Square and see this poor municipal building so

dilapidated now and it doesn't bother them at all. But for those of us who still have a great deal of affection for the town, it's very disturbing."

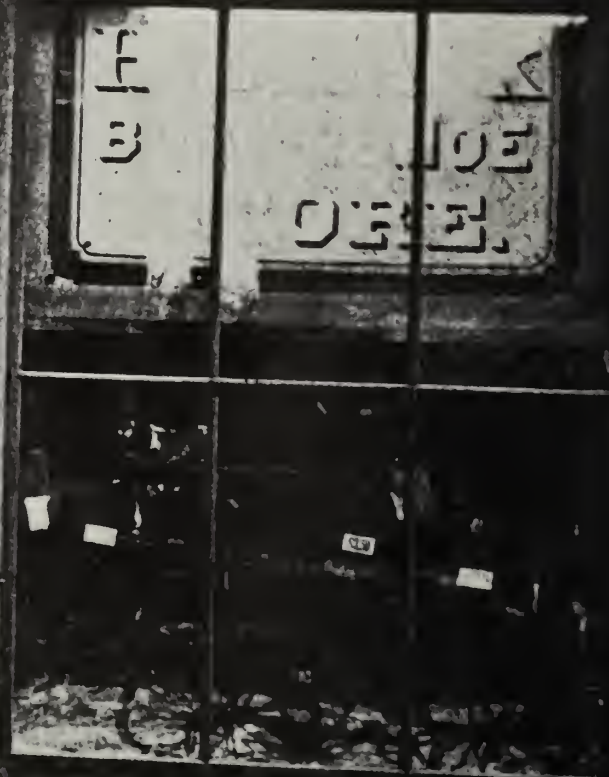
Joe Langille is confident, however, that the majority of Hyde Park's young people are facing problems realistically, and continue to identify with their neighborhood. "Most of my friends from high school went on to college or into the service or got married. Once they're married and have families, most of them settle back here. They really have a great deal of community feeling."

Father Burke sums up the feelings of many Hyde Park people.

"This has been home to me. It's still home, and I have a great deal of fondness for it."

# BOOTS & SHOES.

BOOTS  
&  
SHOES  
&  
CASH  
STORE  
BOOTS  
&  
SHOES  
&  
CASH





# *Project Staff*

KATIE KENNEALLY, *project coordinator, editor-in-chief*

ANNE MILLET, *writer, copy editor*

SUSAN WICK, *interviewer, writer*

JAN CORASH, *photographic editor*

EUGENE WALLACE, *neighborhood coordinator*

HARRON ELLENSEN, *director Boston 200*

MICHAEL AND WINIFRED BIXLER, *typography*

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BOSTON enjoys an international reputation as the birthplace of our American Revolution. Today, as the nation celebrates its 200th anniversary, that struggle for freedom again draws attention to Boston. The heritage of Paul Revere, Sam Adams, Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill still fire our romantic imaginations.

But a heritage is more than a few great names or places—it is a culture, social history and, above all, it is people. Here in Boston, one of our most cherished traditions is a rich and varied neighborhood life. The history of our neighborhood communities is a fascinating and genuinely American story—a story of proud and ancient peoples and customs, preserved and at the same time transformed by the American urban experience.

So to celebrate our nation's birthday we have undertaken to chronicle Boston's neighborhood histories. Compiled largely from the oral accounts of living Bostonians, these histories capture in vivid detail the breadth and depth of our city's complex past. They remind us of the most important component of Boston's heritage—people, which is, after all, what the Bicentennial is all about.

KEVIN H. WHITE, *Mayor*



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